



The Public Advocate for the City of New York

Betsy Gotbaum

Public Advocate

Contact: Stewart Desmond (212) 669-4166
Anat Jacobson (212) 669-4743 or (646) 321-4400
email ajacobson@pubadvocate.nyc.gov

Public Advocate Calls for Mayor to Save Recycling

Cites Working Programs in Other Cities and Changes to Bottle Bill to Make System a Success

(June 14, 2002, City Hall Steps) -- New York City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum joined environmentalists in urging the Mayor to provide funding to keep the City's curbside recycling program going for the next six months.

"Recycling helps us preserve our neighborhoods and deal with our huge solid waste issues. I'm urging the Mayor to take six months to explore how to make the program effective in recycling glass and metal," said Public Advocate Gotbaum. "The program works in several major cities, including Seattle, and we should take the time to figure out how to make it work here."

"This program is too important to end in a moment of fiscal panic," continued Gotbaum. "We've invested millions of dollars in public education that would be wasted if the program were suspended for any length of time. The public supports it and State law requires that recycling be part of our waste management strategy, so we can not and should not just do away with it."

The Public Advocate is also urging that the proposed changes to the Bottle Bill be made. Currently, bottlers retain the 5 cent deposit from non-redeemed bottles. Gotbaum believes municipalities should get this money and she also believes that the program should be expanded to include other beverage containers not currently included in the current bill. "In 2000 unclaimed deposits amounted to \$107 million. That's money we could use to temporarily alleviate the funding problems and to explore long-term solutions."

New York State Assembly Member William Colton of 47th District in Brooklyn, chair of the State Legislative Commission on Solid Waste Management, joined Gotbaum at the press conference to read a letter to the Mayor signed by 41 Assembly members calling for preservation of the recycling program.

“Suspending recycling would be a false savings giving the illusion of improving the budgets balance while actually incurring longer term costs and eroding the quality of life in our neighborhoods,” said Assemblyman Colton.

While the City’s Department of Sanitation (DOS) has estimated the yearly cost of the metal, glass and plastic collection program to be \$51 million, recycling advocates question the City’s numbers. The City has provided little of the data on which their cost analysis is based. However, environmentalists point out that some of the underlying assumptions are highly questionable. For example, DOS averaged the cost of the all the bids from firms that take these materials from the City when, by law, DOS is required to go with the lowest bidder.

The Waste Prevention Coalition, a city-wide group, has issued a report identifying ways that the City can retain and even enhance its waste prevention, composting and recycling programs by implementing a plan that includes both budget savings and revenue enhancements. Ending collection of grass clippings, for example, would save the City \$7 million to \$10 million a year. These savings could fund the recycling program.

Environmentalists also believe that the supposed savings of ending the program will never be realized because recyclables will end up with all of the other waste that the City now pays top dollar to private firms to export by truck to distant landfills. “Without recycling,” Gotbaum noted, “the City is left with a single solid waste option– landfill disposal. Nationwide, recycling costs 35% less than landfilling.”

“There are also consequences that the City hasn’t factored in,” said the Public Advocate. “Before we had the bottle deposit law our parks and playgrounds were awash in broken glass. If we end recycling, the playgrounds will again be unsafe for kids because maintenance staff in the Parks Department has been cut to the bone. We need recycling.”